

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, April 2, 1901, with transcript, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. GRAND HOTEL QUISISANA, Castellammare, Pompei. April 2nd 1901. My dear Alec:

I have been mean in not writing you since we left Paris, but we have been travelling pretty steadily, and I have not felt inclined to letter writing.

I had to spend all that two thousand dollars before I left Paris, which seems horrible but I do not see how it was possible for me to have avoided it. I had to get my spring dresses, which cost a great deal more than I wish they had. The only thing is that I have not left a debt behind to bother us by and by. I have since had to draw another two hundred and will have to draw another in a few days as we are going to Sicily.

I thought you would not mind my coming to Italy, indeed there was nothing else for me to do. I am sure Mamma needs me very much until Grace comes out and between you and me my dear I think Mamma likes travelling with me best. We get along very quietly. Daisy, Gipsy and Miss Whitney go together, and Mamma and I with each other. I thought it would be such a nice chance for me to revisit Italy for I did not think you would ever care especially to come here again, and I wanted to see it once more, and so did Daisy. But since I have been here I have wanted you greatly for I have been sure that you would enjoy and be interested in the wonderful natural scenery through which we have been driving this last week. You know Sorrento, but you don't know what is behind it, nor did I for all that coast 2 until within the last few years was accessible only by boat and mule or footpaths. In 1894 (I think) the new road from Amalfi to Sorrento was opened and Norway can show nothing in its way more stupendous than the gigantic rocks along whose precipitous sides the road has been cut. It is a most wonderful piece of engineering, a road half the time hanging suspended over gaps, often passing through tunnels blasted

Library of Congress

through solid rock, and seldom built along natural earth levels. It is a carriage road mind you, not a railroad. I cannot remember any other carriage road that went through so many tunnels, fortunately short ones so that no view is lost. It is wonderfully level too, so as to be easy for the horses carried by high stone arches over narrow deep ravines, cut in the face of the rock, through it or built up from projecting rock points. And the mountains along whose sides the road winds, how stupendous are they! They raise in gigantic fantastic steps straight up from the deep blue ocean, great precipices piled one on top of the other, up into the clear blue sky far above our heads. They are tremendous volcanic masses, of turfa. I want you to tell me their history, to read it off their scarred furrowed faces. Everywhere where foothold can be secured these wonderful peasants of Italy have built their terraces and planted their orange, lemon and olive trees. Such little bits of terraces as they are mostly, about big enough to be covered by a dozen gentleman's silk handkerchiefs, yet there they were hanging in the apparently most inaccessible places. It seemed as if only goats could get up to them often. Up those terraces went, line above line, and down they went below the road, line below line, to the very edge of precipice or narrow pebbly beach that met the water. 3 Always however at the very last the barren volcanic nature of the mountains asserted itself and we could see the dry stone tops stretching above the little patches of green. The whole crest from Amalfi to Sorrento is almost entirely rough mountain side with only a few breaks here and there where some mountain torrent or perhaps some great convulsion of nature has forced apart the mountains and deep ravines run up their sides. And these ravines are filled with the wonderful Italian villages. There is never any level space, and they are just scrambling up the more sloping valley sides one on top of the other, with the church tower highest of all. They say many of these strange white washed villages, cities rather, for the houses and inhabitants are crowded together as only the inhabitants of our American seaboard cities are crowded, and almost deserted so great has been the emigration to America. Those who are left are the young and the old, who come home always to end their days where they were born. I cannot see why toilers so patient so hard working as these should not be desirable colonists, while more and more I am amazed at the great beauty of

Library of Congress

the women old as well as young. They carry all their burdens on their heads, and oh, how regal is their bearing and how stately their figures. And they look one straight in the face with a fearless conscious dignity that often breaks into a cordial smile of welcome. Beggars there are in plenty, chiefly just the prettiest children I ever saw that run along side side the carriage and laugh whether you throw them a penny or the driver strikes at them with his whip. But I do not mean these, I mean the peasants one meets walking steadily along under their heavy burdens. They sometimes smile on you, and often on each other. They may be poor and heavily taxed, it is said so, but they laugh and look fat and well-fed, at least the peasants of Amalfi, Sorrento, Capri and hereabouts. We went into the Blue Grotto, it has not changed a particle since I last went there a child of fourteen with four others, now all gone from the things that be. How the puny ? of humanity impresses one here among the works of nature, works as certainly of mechanical force I suppose as the bricks of the Romans which still cling among these ruins of mightier forces. And these bricks were placed there centuries ago, and other bricks have been built up above them and now are tumbling to pieces. And everywhere stucco buildings fresh, clean but unsubstantial are raising above these and a new race is living its little life, soon to pass and be as nothing. One does not feel the littleness of man in America for there there is no past, all is of the present and it seems as if the present was always to be. Here man is so little, so degenerated, building over again in smaller ways the great works of his ancestors.

The girls have gone up Vesuvius today. I would have liked to have gone too but did not want to leave Mamma for a whole day. It is lovely here the first really warm and sunny day we have had. Spring is all about; the apples, peaches and plums are in their first tender blossoming. It is the Resurrection of the earth and the Catholic Italian world is preparing for the Resurrection of the Saviour. All around crucifixes are shrouded and altar pictures covered. Thursday the altar lights all over will be put out one by one until one only is left, and this will be hidden to be produced later when the commemorative services of Good Friday and Saturday are over and on Sunday all the world rejoices in the coming again 5

Library of Congress

of the Lord. It is beautiful here where all Nature rejoices too. I love the spring, I hope when it comes my turn to pass from the things that be, it may be in the Springtime.

How is it with you, my own dear one, I am counting the days when we shall be together again. Just before I left Paris I had a letter from Elsie in which she said you were not well. I realized then instantly on how insecure a foundation my present contentment rests. I don't mind being away from you so long as I think you are well and busy and happy, but the moment I think of your being overworked and ill, then I want to go right back to you. Keep well dear and don't work too hard, there are so few like you, and I want England to know you just this once.

Lovingly always, Yours.